

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003588

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/EX, EAP/BCLTV

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [APER](#)

SUBJECT: NOMINATION OF MICHAEL D. SWEENEY FOR THE POWELL FELLOWS PROGRAM

REF: A. STATE 92063

[1](#)B. STATE 79836

#### NOMINATION STATEMENT

[1](#)1. (U) I nominate Michael D. Sweeney for consideration as one of the EAP Bureau's nominees for the Powell Fellows Program. Michael is a tenured FS-03 Foreign Service generalist who has distinguished himself while working in the Consular and Political sections in Embassy Bangkok. He is the type of officer whose strong qualities should be nurtured early in his career, and the Powell Fellows Program is an excellent opportunity to provide him with exposure and development that will redound to the Department's benefit.

Mike's contributions to the Mission in his current position as the Embassy's human rights officer have been exceptional. He is known for his initiative, insightful written work, astute cultivation of government and NGO contacts, and general ability to stay far ahead of the curve on reporting or any of the many projects for which he is responsible. Mike is widely respected by American and Thai staff for his maturity and motivation, and for his openness to people and ideas.

Examples that highlight Mike's performance and abilities come easily to mind. Mike's Thailand 2004 Chapter for the Human Rights Report (HRR) was praised as one of the best in the region. His early drafts were balanced, detailed and clearly written. He negotiated careful edits with the Department. Mike also authored several of the most relevant cables sent from Bangkok, including an analytic piece, "Thaksin's Victory -- Credit the Man, Innovative Policies, and the Thai Rak Thai Political Machine." That cable in particular illustrated Mike's great versatility. When the tsunami disaster strained the Political section's ability to properly cover the national elections, Mike easily stepped up to a central role in reporting on domestic politics, adroitly drawing on knowledge gleaned from being our lead reporter on Thai civil society. Mike's cable on the views of the new foreign minister toward Thai-Burma relations, "New Face, Same Policy," also influenced Washington. In updates to senior colleagues, briefings to visitors on his areas of responsibility, and exchanges with Thai officials and politicians, Mike's verbal skills mirrored his writing; he was always organized, informed, articulate and to the point. Remarkably, Mike could make such presentations in either Thai or English -- he is by far the best Thai language speaker in the Political section and is rivaled by only a handful of other Americans in the entire Mission.

Mike's leadership potential is especially impressive. He is relatively new to the Foreign Service, but entered after over 10 years of work experience, most of it overseas, in community development, human rights and refugee work. He brings good judgment and a seasoned background to his efforts to improve the way goals are achieved in the Mission. He has organizational and managerial skills equal to much more senior officers, and time and again in Bangkok has made superior contributions to the work of the Consular and Political sections. He implemented a Department grant supporting Thai citizenship for hill tribes. Working closely with USAID, he was the prime shaper of a USD 1 million program to improve freedom of the press in Thailand.

#### PERSONAL STATEMENT OF NOMINEE MICHAEL SWEENEY

[1](#)2. (U) I would like to participate in the Powell Fellows Program because I want to broaden my leadership skills, including the ability to find creative solutions to problems, enhance openness in our profession to innovation, and ultimately to become a more effective diplomat. Since joining the State Department in 2001, I have learned that leadership requires the ability to see problems and solutions to those problems in a multidimensional way, beyond the traditional top-down bureaucracy that holds our many administrative and decision-making systems together. Being part of large regional missions like Manila and Bangkok, which constitute a vast array of agencies, I have experienced the need to contrast and compare different work cultures from various offices and agencies at post. I have had to learn to make meaningful contacts with key officers from other

agencies that helped me do my job better. Lastly, I learned the importance of promoting the State Department's key programs and policy initiatives within the context of the interagency Mission team. All of these efforts required leadership.

One recent example where my own leadership skills were called to task was during discussions about Economic Support Funds (ESF) for Burma. I was tasked with organizing logistics for a joint State Department - USAID team visiting the Thai-Burma border and Bangkok. The goal of the trip was to find out the best way to spend funds earmarked by Congress to support pro-democracy groups working for democratic change inside Burma. Yet even as closely as State and AID work together, I found a real culture gap: in work vocabulary, budget cycles, and even the mundane details of protocol at meetings. At the end of the trip, after a week of traveling and 12-hour days of site visits and office calls, team members were asking the question, "What now?" For a while, it appeared that no one wanted to make the suggestion we were all dreading: another meeting. I found myself in a situation where leaders can often find themselves thinking, "Who is going to ask the question, speak up and make a suggestion and get the ball rolling?" Well, I did. Almost overnight, rather than letting the joint team just get on a plane the next day and go back to DC, I organized a late afternoon meeting of all the relevant offices and section chiefs (including the Ambassador and AID Mission Chief) to get a summary of the findings of the team and to learn more about the many offices at post that work on Burma. If I had not looked beyond my control officer role and seen the larger interagency picture, that meeting and the possibilities for further interagency and interoffice exchange on one of the most important issues to this Mission and to the U.S., would not have taken place.

I think broadening this experience even further through a program of contacts with leaders in politics, academia, research centers and other sectors would be an excellent chance to build on the leadership skills I have achieved thus far.

As I come near the end of my second tour as a Foreign Service Officer, I look forward to the challenges facing me as Consular manager in Vientiane, Laos. My goal following that is to seek increasing management responsibilities at a larger Consular post, such as Guangzhou or another larger post in another geographic region. I would also like to pursue work in either the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL), or Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), where I can use my background and personal interest in human rights, civil society and refugees to lead others in our shared task of implementing the management of human and other resources to accomplish our foreign policy objectives.

BOYCE